

**Meeting Minutes**  
**State College Borough Council**  
**Joint Work Session with Centre County Board of Commissioners**  
**February 5, 2021**

The State College Borough Council met in a Virtual Meeting on Friday, February 5, 2021, in the Municipal Building, 243 South Allen Street, State College, PA 16801. County Commissioner Michael Pipe called the Work Session to order at 11:18 a.m.

Present:	<u>Borough Council</u>	<u>Centre County Commissioners</u>
	Ronald L. Filippelli, Mayor	Michael Pipe, Chair
	Jesse L. Barlow, Council President	Mark Higgins, Vice-Chair
	Deanna M. Behring	Steven G. Dershem
	Janet P. Engeman	
	Theresa D. Lafer	
	Peter S. Marshall	
	Evan Myers	
	Katherine Oh Yeaple	

Also Present: Thomas J. Fountaine, II, Borough Manager; Thomas R. King, Assistant Borough Manager for Public Safety; Roger A. Dunlap, Assistant Borough Manager/Chief Finance Officer; Margaret Gray, Centre County Administrator and Chief Clerk; Natalie Corman, Human Service Administrator for Centre County; Dr. Patricia Best, Mental Health Task Force; Stacy E. Hall, Administrative Assistant; and Borough residents virtually via C-NET and those who registered through the Virtual Meeting link.

### **Virtual Meeting Guidelines**

Mr. Shontz provided a procedural overview for the virtual meeting.

### **Opening and Introductory Remarks**

Commissioner Pipe announced the County Commissioners and Borough Council were gathering in partnership to look at specific recommendations of the Mental Health Task Force that had some overlap and cooperation partnerships between the Borough and County through the Mental Health Office.

Mr. Barlow said the focus of the meeting would be on the following recommendations from the Mental Health Task Force:

- #21 – Form a core subgroup of the Task Force to meet quarterly to review progress made and data on the recommendations provided by various entities.
- #20 – Create an implementation plan by operationalizing the Task Force recommendations.

He noted the task at hand was urgent and both the Commissioners and Council needed to work on services forcefully and thoughtfully in that area. Mr. Pipe added the work done today would be looked at by other communities and might be used as a model.

### **Borough Council Update/Recommendation #21**

Mr. Fountaine shared that staff created a line item in the amount of \$235,000 in the 2021 Operating Budget to assist in the funding of a Civilian Response Team or Co-Responder Model for response to mental health calls. He said staff had been researching information from other police departments that had a similar model. He added on January 8, Borough Council reviewed the Task Force report and recommendations in a special work session in preparation for the joint work session, and communicated with Task Force Chair, Dr. Patricia Best, to discuss ideas related to the two (2) implementation recommendations. Mr. Fountaine noted Chief Gardner and other county Chiefs of Police wrote letters of

support for the SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) Grant which the County was awarded and would help address several of the report recommendations.

Regarding Recommendation #21 which was to form a core subgroup of the Task Force to meet quarterly to review progress made and data on the recommendations provided by various entities, Mr. Fountaine said staff suggested directing the County Administrator and the Borough Manager to work with the Mental Health Task Force Chair to develop a specific charge and parameters for an Ad Hoc Progress Review Committee (PRC). He said staff was directed to develop the details for the PRC, including the number of members, committee responsibilities, meeting frequency, duration of the committee, etc. and they would report the proposal to the respective boards for approval no later than March 12, 2021.

### **County Update/Recommendation #20**

Margaret Gray, Centre County Administrator and Chief Clerk, said the Task Force presented a thorough report on November 10 and 19 recommendations were on the table encompassing all aspects of a very complex system involving various stakeholders. She noted the Board of Commissioners looked at the recommendations during two separate meetings, and both the Borough and County had been moving ahead with actions continuing to support and enhance mental health services while the structure was being developed.

Natalie Corman, Human Service Administrator for Centre County, said the County's recommendation was to consider adoption of a framework which organized the Task Force Report recommendations by assignment of a lead organization and/or partnership and that entity would be asked to evaluate each assigned recommendation and identify and implementation timeframe.

Ms. Corman reviewed the recommendations from the Centre County Mental Health Office along with the timeline for each item in detail.

Commissioner Pipe announced it was time for a discussion about how all these items could be collaborated. He said so far, the County and Borough had worked well together and needed to keep the momentum going.

Ms. Behring said she understood from the presentation that the short-term goals were targeted for 2021 which was great, but she voiced her concern about the long-term goals that were not attached to a timeline. She asked if a medium term would be considered instead of long term? She thought it was important to agree on the timeline for the bigger issues and how to organize them. Ms. Corman responded stating under County leadership, a long-term goal was a transportation plan and was due to funding. She added it would require providers along with a way to strategize how to implement it and it needed an opportunity to develop. She said it was also pushed into 2022 because of the timing of the fiscal year. If a medium-term goal was the recommendation of Council, that could be considered moving forward.

Ms. Engeman thought the data base of people would be a complicated thing to deal with and asked if it would affect confidentiality? Ms. Corman answered that privacy practices needed to be reviewed individually and collectively and would not be a barrier to not use the data base. She said some of the data might not identify individuals but be collective data. Ms. Engeman thought it would be useful to know if a person had problems that had been addressed before, but those problems could be confidential. Ms. Corman assured her that privacy would be reviewed and considered as the plan was developed.

Ms. Lafer thanked everyone for the amazing amount of work that was done. She asked Ms. Corman if she thought she had enough information to get set up and if she thought Council was supporting her enough on community outreach and triage? Ms. Corman said both Borough Council and the County were coming to the table independently to review the Task Force recommendations. She said the area was fortunate there were providers who wanted opportunities for change and enhanced services. She added the Task Force relied heavily on the community network to get things done.

Ms. Yeaple offered congratulations on winning the SAMSA Grant and stated she was pleased that Centre County was taking the lead in mental health. She said the Task Force Report was wonderful because it prioritized prevention over crisis intervention and prevention was key. She stated coordination with families was super important and that was highlighted in the report. She noted the report indicated that state laws were antiquated and stated Council could advocate for change and form a core group in the State to talk about changing mental health laws.

Mr. Marshall commented that Recommendation #20 talked about lead organizations or partnerships and Ms. Corman outlined the recommendation and suggested what organizations should provide leadership and where partnership was important. He said he saw no problem with what was recommended and would support using what she proposed.

Mayor Filippelli asked Ms. Corman how many of the recommendations could be done by her organization now without major additions and how much of it was doable by bringing more partners in such as volunteer agencies or nonprofits? He said that would give him an idea of how big the task ahead was both financially and in terms of the availability of personnel to carry them out. Ms. Corman answered a number of the recommendations were more procedural and available for us through current entities and were currently being done. She said a lot were about enhancing what already was being done. She said the model required staffing and funding and the SAMSA Grant would help with that.

Commissioner Pipe commented that the Mental Health Court would take the most time and funding. He also said everyone needed to remember evidence-based programs and initiatives needed to be implemented and trained in a specific way and it would be challenging during the pandemic. He noted the group had all the pieces to get us to the finish line and would be challenging with the co-responder model, but it still needed to get done. He noted grants were received from the federal and state government from the opioid epidemic and more staff had been able to be hired. He said the 911 enhanced policy and practices would be able to be moved on quickly and the staff there was eager to work with us. In response to Mayor Filippelli's concern, he said a funding partnership needed set up which would not be easy but was essential. He said receiving grants was great, but they should not be depended on and solid funding was crucial.

Commissioner Higgins noted he did some research with PSU Staff and found there were four other counties in Pennsylvania changing 911 policies and procedures regarding mental health and best practices would be observed.

Mr. Myers thanked the County Commissioners, Borough Council, staff and the Task Force for their work stating it was a very much needed service that needed to be moved forward. He agreed with Mr. Marshall that the way forward had been presented and he agreed with it. He said he also thought the questions asked had been either answered or the issues understood and that spoke volumes to the expertise involved. Mr. Myers said where the funding would come from needed to be considered and reallocation of expenditures would be challenging as there was not an unlimited supply of funds. Ms. Corman said funding was a concern in 2012 when the state had a 10 percent cut to funding line items in Mental Health Services and that amount had not yet been reallocated back, but fortunately Centre County was awarded Human Service Block Grant funding and that money could be moved around respectfully.

Ms. Yeaple asked Ms. Corman if she was stating there was no mental health funding available from the state or federal government? Ms. Corman said county funding was for people without insurance. She said they had been able to get additional dollars through grants and move money around internally, but since 2012 no additional monies from the government had been received. Ms. Yeaple asked if there was private foundation money available to help? Ms. Corman said that was being explored. She added medical assistance billing was a large funder that was used to offset the costs of services. Ms. Yeaple asked if there was a high turnover of behavioral health workers and would that be a problem? Ms. Corman answered turnover was difficult in her line of work and the individuals going into that line of work want to do as much as they can, so it involved a lot of training and guidance. She adding staff was always a concern as consistent staff was needed who were available 24-7 for crisis response.

Ms. Lafer commented the state and federal governments needed pushed to provide funding again and the group should not let up on it.

Mr. Marshall said to move forward there needed to be a consensus from the two groups. He asked if there was a consensus for adopting the proposal made by Ms. Corman.

Commissioner Pipe asked if there were any concerns in moving in that direction. Mr. Barlow said he agreed with Mr. Marshall and asked if that was the consensus of Council. The Council Members agreed. Commissioner Pipe asked the Commissioners if they were in agreement and all agreed to move forward. There were no more comments from Council or the Commissioners.

## **Public Participation**

Commissioner Pipe opened the meeting for public participation.

Jose Ventura, a Ferguson Township resident, said he had been involved with the process because of a family member with mental health issues for ten years. He said he was surprised that the bullying going on in the high school was not discussed here. He pointed out that mental health problems could begin in high school and that needed to be taken seriously.

Ms. Corman explained that in terms of the schools, SAP (Student Assistant Programs) were out in the school districts and they had internal teams. She said crisis providers worked with school districts across the county and there was a Children's Team that brought everyone together to discuss concerns and services. She noted high school could be difficult and could cause long-bearing symptoms for people and the goal was to be preventative.

Melanie Morrison, a Rebersburg resident, said she was very encouraged there was a consensus and the quick movement on the recommendations. She noted that many could not attend the meeting due to work and other commitments and asked if community input would be handled in the same way as she would like to pass that on to the 3.20 coalition. Commissioner Pipe said both the Board of Commissioners and Borough Council would be receiving proposals to review progress and there would be an opportunity to reach out to us with comments. He suggested people reach out via e-mail or call to let the group know their thoughts and feedback.

Nicole Morgan, a Halfmoon Township resident, said it was refreshing that there was a consensus on the topic, and she thanked Ms. Corman and her staff. Since HIPPA was brought up, she wanted to let Council know ideas were being looked at to remove barriers in coordinated care. She added that in changing Pennsylvania laws, the more voices that were heard, the better and urged anyone interested to reach out to advocate. She asked Dr. Best, regarding Recommendation #21, if she could talk about how the current Task Force members were going to be selected. Dr. Best said Recommendations 20 and 21 were the life blood of the whole report and the consensus on the recommendations would help movement toward action. Dr. Best said she asked the Task Force members if they would be willing and able to continue working and had several who had volunteered.

Chris Potalivo, a Boalsburg resident, said he and his wife, Peg, had been involved in the mental health process for many years and commended Commissioner Pipe for leading the discussion months ago and committing to creating a Task Force. He said the report submitted was outstanding and #19 directly impacted how the 302 process came to a conclusion which was currently in the ED (Emergency Department). He explained a situation regarding his daughter who was in the ED and was discharged at 1 a.m. with no Behavioral Health Staff sign off and she was arrested a few hours later. He said he knew a boy who was released from the ED and then committed suicide hours later. He pointed out they were released without any other family member knowing about it. He thought subtasks should be created and behavioral specialists should sign off before these patients were discharged and was asking for a re-focus on that issue. As far as liaison between the hospital and prison system, he said his daughter was back in prison. He said she overdosed on prescription meds and there was no state health system anymore. He said when she overdosed, she broke probation and they put her back in jail which was not

serving her any purpose at all. He said they got an attorney to push to get her into a rehab program after jail and it took too long to get through the current system for her to get a bed in a program. He thought when a bed became open it should be an accelerated program to get them the help they need. Mr. Potalivo also suggested a check box on licensing renewals to donate to mental health programs. He thanked everyone and said he was encouraged that progress was being made. He made a plea to Ms. Morrison that the issue at hand was more complex than accusing police officers of murder. He said energies should be focused on promoting better mental health services and it was more than a Borough initiative and needed to be a focused federal program to protect the people.

Commissioner Pipe said subtasks could be flushed out once the Task Force was set up and said all feedback would be kept in mind.

David Stone said the Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition had been talking about taking advantage of Act 315 as a funding source or authority source to deal with challenges and he was wondering why the Public Health Departments would not be asked to provide some glue and structure as he saw advantages to that. Commissioner Pipe said in terms of the Public Health Office, what they were looking at was very different. He said the Public Health Office focused more on non-mental health issues as that was the requirement of the state. When a Mental Health Office was established, it had to be used for specific purposes. Mr. Barlow told Mr. Stone that some money had been set aside and would be a topic of future discussion in the Borough.

Mr. Ventura spoke again stating the 302 system was a very difficult situation that could end up bad for the client. He said when families make a phone call, they do not know the details of the consequences. He realized many police officers and mental health people had training, but it needed to be applied. He thought these situations could be handled in a different way and solved more peacefully.

Mr. Pipe invited the public to attend future meetings and he announced there was a consensus and action related to Recommendations 20 and 21. He noted future conversations would be held to solidify them and would be discussed at future meetings.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, Commissioner Pipe adjourned the meeting at 1:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Sharon K. Ergler, Assistant Borough Secretary

Prepared by: Stacy E. Hall, Administrative Assistant